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ABSTRACT

A study of male secondary school principals' reactions to the resumes of fictional candidates for the assistant principalship suggested that experience is the most important criterion considered by principals assessing candidates, and that the sex of the candidate may be relatively unimportant. Three groups of male principals were asked to choose between two fictional candidates. One group of 28 selected respondents was not told the sex of either applicant. A second group of respondents, representing 40 percent of a randomly selected sample of 150 principals, was told that the first applicant was male and the second female. The third group, comparable to the second, was told that the first applicant was female and the other male. Approximately 90 percent of the respondents in each group selected the second candidate. Over 50 percent of the respondents cited experience as a major factor in the selection process. Other factors cited were a candidate's educational background, extracurricular activities, academic record, age, and specific skills. Only two percent cited sex as a contributing factor. This report includes a review of relevant literature, discussions of the methodology and findings, recommendations for further study, and a bibliography. The two resumes used are also reproduced. (PGD)

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INFLUENTIAL CRITERIA IN THE INTITIAL SELECTION OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES: A STUDY OF DETERMINING FACTORS IN RESUME ANALYSIS

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INFLUENTIAL CRITERIA IN THE INTITIAL SELECTION OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES: A STUDY OF DETERMINING FACTORS IN RESUME ANALYSIS

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The approximately 60,000 public high schools in the United States have an average of one assistant principal each. Approximately two percent of the administrative positions in high schools in this country are held by women. With these positions often providing the entry way into administration for those who serve in various leadership capacities in our school systems--they become our principals, directors, and superintendents--the selection of persons for the assistant principalship bears significance far beyond the immediate importance of the position itself. Not only does the selection of an assistant principal from among a number of candidates fill a particular position vacancy, but it serves as a gate-keeping act with long-term impact. Essentially that selection decision determines who will be able to move to even more significant levels of leadership within the public schools.

Therefore it is the purpose of this study to provide an analysis of selected factors that influence the selection of candidates for further consideration and specifically for interviewing for the position of assistant principal, since it is generally through this process that hiring decisions are made and the neophytes are initiated into the administrative ranks.

Specifically this study will seek to determine the affects of candidates' age, academic records, previous employment experience, and sex on high school principals' selection of candidates for interview purposes. The research will focus on the following questions: Do specific factors of candidate age, level of academic performance, years of teaching experience, evidence of peer leadership roles, and sex serve to either encourage or discourage the selection of a particular candidate to be interviewed for the position of assistant principal. More particularly, do these characteristics play different roles in candidate choice when they are associated with persons of one sex versus another?

Typical searches for candidates for managerial-level positions begin with a review of paper materials which present the background and professional characteristics of the applicants. Generally these materials (in a school administrator search) include any but not necessarily all of the following: application form, resume, transcripts, and letters of reference. Either an individual or a committee of persons named by the hiring organi-

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zation looks through these paper materials, and attempts to narrow the pool of applicants to a number suitable for conducting individual interviews of each candidate.

Also typical of this phase of the selection process is a lack of specified criteria to separate the "good" candidates from those who will not be given further consideration. While persons involved in the screening (sorting) process may have a job description for the position for which they are seeking a candidate, they rarely have a list of indicators of good performance of those job expectations.

Review of Literature

A review of existing literature in the fields of education, business, and psychology reveals little systematic attention having been devoted to developing an understanding of the processes by which candidates are either included in or excluded from further consideration for an open position. No writings address the specific process of resume evaluation as a discreet event, and very few materials address the process of school administrator selection. Two studies of teacher selection (Bredeson, 1982; and Boyd, 1982) looked at the impact of paper credentials on evaluation of teacher candidates. Bredeson reported no relationship of length or tone of information in letters of recommendation to overall evaluation of candidates; Boyd reported that the determining factors in selection all came from the interview process.

A number of studies have focused on the influence of the applicants' sex in selection for further consideration or in hiring (Cann, Sigfried, and Pearce, 1981; Dipbaye, Fromkin, and Wilback, 1975; Krigar and Shikiar, 1978; McIntyre, Moberg, and Posner, 1980; Ortiz, 1982; Rosen and Jerdee, 1974; Valverde, 1975).In each case the data have shown men to be the preferred candidates. None of these studies looked specifically at the review of resumes.

Several researchers have found that the characteristics of the raters were likely to determine the characteristics of the candidates selected (Hakel, 1975; Rose and Andiappan, 1978); Valverde, 1975). This is important to the present study in that approximately 98 percent of all secondary school administrators are male and play a prominent role in the selection of initiates to the administrative ranks. The perception that the job being filled was a difficult one--a desciption applicable to the position of high school assistant principal--influenced selectors to choose male candidates for a managerial position in an earlier study (Rosen and Jerdee, 1974). Some research even projects that it is the sex-role context--that is, the relationship of sex roles and the way society commonly views them and the nature of the job --and not simply the applicant's sex that is the determining factor (Rose and Andiappan, 1978).

Little is known, however, about the impact of age, academic performance, or previous experience as factors used in the process of differentiating one candidate for an administrative position in the schools from another. While we do know that women tend to enter the administrative ranks of the public schools at a much later age than do their male counterparts, and while we do know that nearly all school superintendents were coaches as well as teachers, there appears no systematic consideration of the roles of these variables in the selection new administrators. Much of the literature noted above comes from the business world, and may not necessarily present an accurate picture of events in education. Thus it is imperative that we try to identify those factors which are at work in the selection of entry level school administrators.

Methodology

Data for this study was gathered in as realistic a situation as possible. The researcher prepared resumes rather typical of candidates for the position of high school assistant principal. While the resumes followed a similar format, they displayed differences between the two candidates in terms of ages, institutions at which they earned their baccalaureate and masters degrees, academic performance as indicated by grade point averages, teaching experiences, peer leadership experiences, and sex, with sex indicated by way of the candidates' names. A second pair of resumes was also prepared, identical to the first except that the names were exchanged, Finally, the researcher prepared a base set of resumes, identical those described above except that they had no names and were labeled "A" and "B" (see Appendix A). This last pair of resumes indicated no sex for the candidates; its purpose was to ascertain a preference for one candidate over the other regardless of sex, and to determine which characteristics influenced the selection of candidates for interview purposes. Each pair of resumes was accompanied by a letter to the respondent asking that he choose one candidate for a personal interview for the position of assistant principal in his high school and that he identify the factors in the resumes that influenced him to select one candidate over the other. Only male principals were included because there were too few female high school principals available in the population area to provide the basis for a comparison of the effects of selector sex.

In order to acquire data that were free from the effects of sex as a variable, the researcher distributed the pair of resumes which had no names on them to an assembled group of 28 male principals with the directions to select the one candidate they would prefer to interview for the position of assistant principal in their own high schools. These respondents also identify the factors in the resumes which influenced their choices of candidates.

Then the researcher mailed 150 copies of one pair of resumes

to randomly selected male high school principals in a large Mid-Western state. At the same time 150 copies of the other pair of resumes (with the names reversed) were mailed to a similar randomly selected sample of male high school principals. In each case the resumes were accompanied by the same cover letter.

Responses were analyzed using the Chi Square statistic to measure the relationship of selection of candidate to the content of the resume. Specifically this test was used to indicate the impact of sex on the choice of candidate since it was the only variable that changed between the two pairs of resumes. Significance was indicated at $p < .05$. The Chi-Square statistic was also chosen for its capacity to accommodate groups of unequal size. The factors the respondents listed as influential in their selections were tabulated for simple frequency counts.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors in a resume influenced the decision to choose one candidate over another for further consideration in the selection process. Specifically, the researcher looked at the effect of sex on the selection of candidates and the impact of sex on the influence of other variables.

The pair of nameless resumes distributed to 28 assembled principals resulted in 26 selections of Candidate B--the older candidate with more years of experience, more experience in peer leadership, and more curriculum experience. Only two principals (7%) chose Candidate A. Those who chose Candidate B (95%) indicated that the influential factors included those points mentioned above and noted the implied communication skills and stronger grade point averages as important also. One of the persons who selected Candidate A noted "more experience as the leader", and the other indicated "associated with students in a wide variety of ways" as his reason for the choice.

For the pair of resumes in which Candidate A was assigned a female name and Candidate B a male name, 60 of 150 potential respondents (40%) returned questionnaires. For the second pair of resumes, in which Candidate A was given a male name and Candidate B was assigned a female name, 46 of150 potential respondents completed the selection task for a return rate of 31 percent. A total of 35 percent of the principals to whom the resumes were sent completed the selection process and returned the response form. Ten additional principals (3% of sample) returned the response form indicating that they could not make a choice on the basis of the information provided.

With the first pair of names resumes, six respondents (10%) chose Candidate A (female), and 54 respondents (90%) chose Candidate B (male). (See Table 1.) Among the 54 respondents, they

gave 147 reasons for choosing Candidate B (a mean of 2.72 reasons per respondent). Eighty-six of those reasons pointed to Candidate B's greater experience. Other significant factors included educational background (15), extra-curricular activities (15), academic record (12), and age (12). Two persons mentioned that they chose Candidate B because of his sex. Among the six persons who chose Candidate A (female), they listed eight reasons (1.33 per respondent) for their choice. Those reasons fell into the same categories as did the reasons for choosing Candidate B.

The respondents whose Candidate A was assigned a male name and whose Candidate B was presented as female selected Candidate B for further consideration in 41 cases (89%) and Candidate A in five cases (11%). Among the 41 respondents who chose Candidate B, they presented 119 reasons (a mean of 2.90 per respondent) for their selection. Sixty-six of the reasons listed referred to superior experience. The other significant factors mentioned included educational background (15), academic record (13), extra-curricular activities (8), and specific skills (8). Two respondents mentioned that they chose Candidate B because of her sex. The five respondents who selected Candidate A (male) gave seven reasons for their choice (1.4 per respondent). Those reasons fell into the categories of sex (2), relevant graduate work (1), work with students (2), leadership (1), and education (1). (See Table 2.)

Table 1

Percent of Candidates Chosen in Each Sample Group

Candidate	Resumes w/o Names	Group 1 B=Male	Group 2 B=female
A	7%	10%	11%
B	93%	90%	89%

A statistical test of the data produced a Chi-Square score of 66.062 (p=.0001) and a Phi score of 0.789. These numbers indicate that the relationship between the content of the resumes, excluding the manipulated variable (sex), and the respondents' choice of resumes is a strong positive one (.789) at a probability level greater than the desired P<.05. With the disparity in group sizes (60 respondents versus 46 respondents), one can view the relationship as even stronger than a correlation of .789 indicates.

Table 2

Reasons for the Selection of Candidate B

Reasons Stated	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Experience	86	59	66	55	152	57
Educational Background	15	10	15	13	30	11
Extra-Curricular Activities	15	10	8	7	23	9
Academic Record (GPA)	12	8	13	11	25	9
Age	12	8	6	5	18	7
Specific Skills	6	4	8	7	14	5
Sex of Candidate	2	1	2	2	4	2

Discussion

When 300 males principals were faced with the problem of selecting only one of two candidates for a hypothetical assistant principal's position in their own school, 106 of them responded with a selection and reasons for their selections. Ninety-five principals (89.6%) selected the same candidate (B) regardless of the sex indicated by the candidate's name on the resume. The reasons for the selection of Candidate B in both respondent pools were virtually the same, and therefore seemed to be unaffected by sex. Those respondents who considered candidates who were identifiable by sex made essentially the same choice as did the principals who analyzed resumes without names and therefore without the variable of sex of the candidate.

Thus it seems fair to conclude from this study that secondary school principals, unlike the respondents in any earlier studies, selected managerial candidates for further consideration without any bias regarding the sex of the candidate. It further seems fair to conclude that secondary school principals display a high degree of agreement on those variables which influence their evaluations of the desirability of particular candidates. Most specifically, the principals put more weight on factors of experience than any others revealed in the resume.

The results of the study do, however, raise a number of questions when they are assessed against previous studies and against the current distribution of males and females in the assitant principalships in American High Schools. The most

obvious question focuses on the disparity between principals' reported evaluations of the resumes and the present picture of role incumbents in secondary school administration, 98 percent of whom are male. One must ask if, when they are playing for keeps, the principals may actually screen out the resumes of females. Or are females actually not applying for secondary school assistant principalships? Or are choices made predominately on the basis of some presentation of credentials other than resumes, in which females do not fare so well? Do personal recommendations, both written and verbal, bear more significance on the selection decision than actual experiences do, and do we thus depend on the perceptions of others about whom we can be rather subtly selective?

Finally we must ask if the rather low response rate in this study has any bearing on the outcome. Is it possible that persons who wished to indicate a preference for a male candidate (what seems to be the practice in reality) found it very easy not to respond to this study at all? The fact that one candidate seemed clearly stronger than the other and yet the weaker candidate was attrib- uted the same reasons for his/her inclusion for further consideration suggests that some principals will find reasons to make the choice they wish to make, regardless of the accuracy of the reasons. Perhaps those who did not wish to put forth transparent reasons instead chose not to respond. These considerations are important in view of the fact that rarely do we have to explain our choices when we screen the paper materials of candidates because that task typically is conducted as a very private matter.

Recommendations for Further Study

The outcome of this study points to a need for a continued look at the process by which candidates for entry level positions in public school administration are evaluated. Since the data are consistent with neither the present picture in secondary school administration nor the researcher's personal experience with administrators' evaluations of potential peers, we must devise some other means of peeling back the layers on the selection process. It may be that only case studies of actual selection processes may reveal the assessment as it truely occurs. In such a study, if one could look at the materials presented by each candidate and develop an objective rating instrument, than selection decisions could be viewed against the credentials presented.

The difficulty of conducting such a study is obvious in that it involves intrusion into what is generally considered a confidential process. And this takes us back to understanding how it is possible that persons within the system can very easily select and initiate those neophytes they want to bring into their clubroom.

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